



OPTIONS CENTER HEALTH TOPIC



A Conversation with Dr. David L. Watts, Trace Elements Lab, Dallas, Texas:

Are nutritional supplements necessary for most people? Without a doubt, they are necessary for most people! It is well accepted that nutritional requirements are affected by many factors. A person's age, sex, stress and activity levels, physiological needs, life style, illness and even their use of medications can modify nutritional requirements. Each of these factors, as well as many additional factors, increases nutritional requirements far beyond what can be obtained simply by eating a "balanced diet."



But experts continue to say that eating a balanced diet will provide the recommended daily allowance of all the essential vitamins and minerals. That's correct. We all have heard this time and time again. However, maybe we should review just what the recommended daily allowance, or RDA, means. The definition of RDA established in 1974 is: *"the levels of intake of essential nutrients that, on the basis of scientific knowledge, are judged by the Food and Nutrition Board to be adequate to meet the known nutrient needs of practically all healthy persons."* Based on this definition, I am sure that you can tell that these guidelines are merely estimates based upon judgments and opinions about presumably healthy people. These guidelines are certainly not based upon "real life people," with varied genetic makeup and potentially suffering from illnesses such as diabetes, obesity, depression, heart disease and cancer. Real life people have different stress and activity levels, may take medications, and are on varied diets. Since the guidelines were first published in 1943, its description has changed over the years. The guidelines were once called minimum daily requirements (MDR) and were eventually changed to RDA. Sarcastically, many in the nutritional field refer to the RDA as "ridiculous daily amounts" since they do not take into consideration the needs of the individual.

So the RDA's have been modified over the years? Yes, they are updated about every five years based on the latest research. In fact, research is continuing to show that the daily allowances are really just the bare minimum for preventing acute nutritional deficiency states. As I said before, the RDA's are simply estimates based upon population studies, which rarely relates to the nutritional needs of a particular individual.

Why can't we get the nutrients we need from our diets? I have been asked this during my lectures many times over the years. My answer is – we could, but only if we lived in an ideal world. That is, if we did not have the extensive environmental pollutants, depleted soils, thousands of chemical additives in our foods, and so many other detrimental factors, we could derive the necessary nutrients from our diets. But we are living in the 21st century, with all its advantages and disadvantages, so we have to make do the best that we can. We are in a war, so to speak, living in a kind of chemical soup from which most of us cannot escape. We must therefore protect ourselves, and I feel that nutritional supplements are a necessity for coping with the adversities of the modern world.



Aren't many diseases related to a poor diet? Well, yes and no. We certainly know that diet or nutrition can help prevent many major diseases. But the research shows that the food intake of individuals who develop chronic diseases are actually similar to those who do not develop these conditions. So, in fact, a healthy diet alone does not ensure the prevention of disease. This is probably another reason that targeted nutrition through dietary supplements is so important.

Can nutritional supplements take the place of a good diet? Absolutely not, and I can't stress this enough. They are supplementary to the diet and can in no way take the place of a good diet. However, supplements help target the nutritional needs of the individual. Imbalances or conflicting relationships between nutrients are the main problem we are dealing with in today's society. Imbalances contribute to a host of health problems due to sub-clinical nutritional conditions that are just becoming more recognized.

Can people get what they need from a simple multivitamin and mineral supplement? This would be an ideal solution if we were all the same. Again, speaking of real life people whose lifestyles vary considerably, it would be hard to fit everyone under one nutritional umbrella. Every person is unique and possesses unique nutritional requirements.

